There is a little story that has supposedly come to us through centuries of Christian tradition. / Jesus had returned to Heaven after his life on earth. He told of the joys and sorrows, the good friends, the suffering; he told of his trial and curcifixion. He ended by describing the little band of disciples that he had left behind to carry on., To him came the question, ("Do you think they will succeed?") They will succeed" was Jesus' calm assurance. "But what provision has been made if they fail?" was the persistent question. The reply "I have made no other provision; they will not fail."

"They will not fail" To whom was Jesus referring? Obviously to the circle of disciples; to those whose work and commitment, and loyalty gave birth to the Christian Churh. / That there is a church, that the Gospel of Jeus Christ has been carried to every corner of the world is evidence that they did not fail. / But neither is their success the end of the story. / From the days of the apostles, down through 2,000 years of history men have been the heirs of Christ's confidence. Today, Nov. 11, 1962, we in this bulding are the heirs of that tradition and calling. Our task, like that of Peter, James, John is very simply to continue that which JexusChrist, the Son of God began. / With this thought in mind I wish to examine the contemporary church, and our church; to see where it has or has not lived up to the expectations of its Lord; to stop and eaxamine some of the more serious problems facing it.

Our scripture lesson this morning included the well known statement to Peter concerning the church. ("You are Peter and on this Rock I will build my church; and the powers of death will not prevail against it.") For 15 centuries the Roman Catholic Church has defended the Papacy with this statement; claiming that Peter here became Christ's first vicar on earth and that the Bishop of Rome shares the powers here given him.

To the second critique we must give a more careful reply. Few if any people would assert that when Jesus used the word translated church he visualized the church as it has evolved over the centuries. What we must do is discover what he did mean when he used the word and that sends us back to the word ἐκκλησία. It did not mean church as we use that term. From the pages of Israelite history God had dealt with man in community. Throughout the Old Testament we read the word congregation, nation, people. God called a group of people together and with them he established a covenant. The community involved was called the "people of God." To translate literally, this phrase--people of God--would be a better rendering of ἐκκλησία, for this O.T. tradition is surely what Jesus had in mind. His followers would become a new community; a new israel, involved in a new Covenant. That he had this in mind there can be no doubt. He clearly commissioned his disciples to go into all the world preaching and teaching, healing and guiding; i.e. they were to continue the work of redempt. to be a part this ἐκκλησία, there was no option.

The first problem of the contemporary church has its roots, or rather its solution, right here. We are not so much involved in a debate whether there ought to be ac church or not. But we are the victims of a Protestant retreat from this passage, and from any firm doctrine of the church. That the church is necessary to Christianity is simply a statement we don't like to make. Because we all know too many people who call themselves Christians, and who feel that the church doesn't have to enter the picture.

To clarify the issue we must again take a cursory look at Church history. Christ's diciples knew what they were to do. They preached and healed and proclaimed the presence of the Kingdom of God. And as a result of their efforts Christian communities sprang up throughout the then known world. Bishops became necessary as the young church grew; and very naturally

The answers to these questions must be in terms personal commitment to Jesus Christ. I have been using the word Church in a general manner; but now let's bring it close to home and see that we, you and I, are the church; that everything said for or against the church applies directly to us in a very personal way. For we, by being here, are claiming to be Christians. We are claiming for ourselves the mission as it was given to Peter, James, John and Paul.

Arthur McKay writing an article on stewardship for Presbyterian Life quotes the well known hymn:

"Take thou ourselves O Lord, Heart Mind and Will,
Through our surrendered souls Thy Plan Fulfill.

We yield ourselves to Thee, Time, Talent, all;
We hear and henceforth heed--to
Thy sovereign call."

Then he describes what seems to be the typical church member's response. ("Look God, we don't mean that literally. We can give some praise to Thee, if there is nothing more directly related to our interests that we must do. We can spend our occassional hour (mind you we don't mean an hour and twenty minutes) in worship from time to time but it isn't always convenient. We do spend a moment here and there in prayer if we've tried everything else, the things in which we secretly have confidence, and they've failed. But God, what we are really looking for is some kind of bargain basement religion. What we'd really like to do, but a certain churchly modesty forbids us to say it, is this; We'd like to accept the unconditional offer of love that we see in Jesus Christ, we're willing to receive as much as you can give; but God, we just don't have time to match your faithfulness with our own. We're looking for religion at a discount.")

This is heady sarcasm, but it is to the point. Christianity means a personal devotion to Jesus Christ that is willing to sacrifice. When the church has lost sight of this it has ceased to be a church; and when Christian men retreat from sacrificial commitment they cease to be Christian men.

This afternoon visitors from the church will call in every home. They will, to the best of their abilities, confront you with the ways in which this church, as a part of Christ's body, intends to go about continuing his work. They will ask you to sign a reaffirmation of faith. It reads "I hereby reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, and recommit myself to his will as it is carried out by His Holy church and by the 1st UPC. I promise, to myself and God, that I will truly attempt to make my church a more effective instrument of my Lord's will." I ask you to read it and think about it for this is the hinge of Christianity. Ask yourself, do I mean it when I call Jesus Christ my Lord? Do I really mean to recommit myself to His Will and his church? You will be asked then to pledge time and money to the church. This is not something different from the first step. There are no separate categories of religion and economics in the Church of Jesus Christ. The personal affirmation of faith--means service and sacrifice. Without them it cannot be called a true affirmation. It is an act of personal devotion which we seek today. We cannot all be missionaries, we can't even suffer physically for our faith--but we can make a concrete experssion of our commitment in our pledge to the Church.

Christianity is not easy and undemanding. But neither is it distressing and painful. The unanimous testimony of men from the Apostle Paul until today is that the Christian faith is a joyful, life giving experience. But it does not come automatically. God does not decend upon us and prompt us suddenly to the heights of religious ecstasy. On the contrary one becomes a Christian partly by the Grace of God and partly by an act of will. We are naive if we expect Christianity to be meaninhful if we have never given of ourselves. There are no short cuts to Christianity --you must take a step in faith, leaning on God's presence and guidance. How else can we explain the behavior of the

Thanksgiving Eve Nov. 21, 1962
Thanksgiving the Harvest Festival

Before I begin let me express, on behalf of my congregation, our appreciation to you of the Methodist Church, for helping to make this community service of Thanksgiving possible. Chritians are closing ranks the world over: and nothing could be more appropriate than our uniting together in this service of worship. It is my hope, and I know that of Rev. Andersen's, that this will be the beginning of a Thanksgiving tardition in Dyer.

As you have probably noticed from your programs, what I am about to do tonight is not a sermon in the traditional sense of the word. We Americans, and especially Methodists and Presbyterians, have significantly altered the focus of Christian worship. In both of our traditions the spoken word is the central aspect of worship. This is as it should be.

But all too frequently we deny ourselves the opportunity of responding to the word of God. This is singularly unfortunate: especially in a service that has been designated as one of Thanksgiving. Giving Thanks is not hearing a sermon: it is a personal response to the goodness of God, and perhaps to the words that have been spoken to you. And so instead of a sermon I have prepared three brief mediatations. They are only my attempt to make you think: to think about the specifc meaning Thanksgiving has for you. After each meditation there will be a few minutes of solitude, during which time I invite you to reflect upon the subjects I have covered, and to offer your own prayer of Thanksgiving.

Let us pray: O Gracious heavenly Father, at this time of Thanksgiving we acknowledge thy Lordship over all. We humbly recognize that thou art the beginning of all beginnings, the life giving force that courses through all creation. Accept our humble words of humble gratitude: may our prayers and meditations be acceptable in thy sight. Amen

THANKSGIVING A HAVEST FESTIVAL

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FOR THE SECOND CONSECUTIVE YEAR ONE OF MY MOST DIFFICLULT TASKS HAS BEEN COMPOSING A THANKSGIVING SERMON. FO SOME REASON THE JOB HAS BEEN VERY HARD FOR ME. IT SEEMS LIKE EVERY THANKSGIVING SERMON IS THE SAME: WE ARE REMONDEBO OF HOW ESPECIALLY BLLESSED WE ARE: BUT IN THE LONG RUN IT SEEMS LIKE ALL WE DO IS CONGRATULATE GOD ON HIS EXCELLENT CHOICE OF PARTNERS - OURSELVES. AND SO THIS YEAR I THOUGHT I&D DO SOMETHING A BIT DIFFERENT. INSTEAD OF A SERMON I HAVE PREPARED 3 BREIF MEDITATIONS. THEY ARE NOT MEANT TO BE PROFOUND OR INFORMATIVE: THEY ARE MOST CERTAINLY NOT INSPIRING OR ENTERTAINING. THEY ARE ONLY MY ATTEMPT TO PROMPT YOU TO THINK: TO THINK ABOUT THE SPECIFIC MEANING THANKSGIVING HAS FOR YOU. AFTER EACH MEDITATION THERE WILL BE A FEW MINUTES OF SOLITUDE DURING WHICH TIME I HOPE YOU WILL REFLECT UPON THE SUBJECTS I HAVE COVERED AND OFFER YOUR OWN PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING.

LET US PRAY: O GRACIOUS HEAVENLY FATHER, AT THIS TIME OF THANKSGIVING WE ACKNOWLEDGE THY LORDSHIP OVER ALL. WE HUMBLY RECOGNIZE THAT THOU ART THE BEGINNING OF ALL BEGINNINGS, THE LIFE GIVING FORCE THAT COURSES THROUGH ALL CREATION. ACCEPT OUR WORDS OF HUMBLE THANKSGIVING, MAY OUR PRAYERS AND MENITATION BE XXXXX PLEASING IN THY SIGHT AMEN

THE PRACTICE OF SETTING ONE DAY ASIDE FOR THANKSGIVING HAS ITS ROOTS DEEP IN THE HISTORY OF MANKIND. THE ANCIENT HEBREWS GATHERED YEARLY TO PRAISE AND SHOW GRATITUDE TO THE GOBD OF ALL NATURE. WAVING SHEAVES OF WHEAT AND CARRYING THE YOUNGEST LAMB OR CALF FROM THEIR FLOCK THEY USED - in their ritual THE TANGIBLE EVIDENCES THAT GOD HAD BLESSED THEM.

Today we have infinitely greater reason to be thankful than either the Israelites or the Pilgrims./ But we have lost that which under-girded their feelings of gratitude: we ~~ac~~ have lost their profound sense of the presence ~~of~~ x of God/ the nearness of God in all Nature/ the love and creativity of God in all of life/ We live in a world of secondary causes./ The phrase, "communing with nature" has come to mean trailers and tents, charcoal grills and mosquito netting. When we look at the stars our minds are diverted from the magificence of the heavens to the speed with which a rocket is approaching the planet Venus./ In our daily lives we can't see the rich blue of the sky for the arrogant thrust of steel and concrete./ We are unable to smell the clean air for the stench of the steel millls./ Our only experience with God's other creaturesis filtered through a crowd at the Lincoln Park Zoo. We live life at a distance: and it is difficult for us to really involve ourselves in a harvest festival: a festival of thanks to the God of Nature.

The God of The Hebrews and the Pilgrims, need be no less real today; As a matter of fact, if we allow ourselve to think, we will quickly see that we have every reason to be even more aware of his presence.

~~IN THEIR RITUAL~~. IN PROFOUND GRATITUDE THEY COULD LOOK UPON THE CROPS AND LIVESTOCK THEY HAD CARED FOR AND WATHCHED GROW, KNOWING THAT IT WAS NOT THEIR EFFORTS ALONE THAT MADE THE HARVEST POSSIBLE. THE GOD THEY THANKED WAS VERY REAL TO THEM -IN THE MIDST OF BARREN DESSERTS HE HAD RAISED UP GREEN PASTURES: AS THEY TENDED THEIR FLOCKS THEY WITNESSED THE DRAMA OF LIFE BEGINNING AND ENDING. THEY FELT, WITH ALL THAT WAS IN THEM, THAT GOD WAS THE MASTER OF ALL NATURE, THE GIVER OF EVERY GIFT.

[redacted] THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO A SMALL BAND OF PEOPLE LANDED ON THE BLEAK AND FORBIDDING NEW ENGLAND COAST. THE ODDS AGAINST THEM SURVIVING WERE GREAT. AND YET WITH RAW COURAGE AND SHEER DETERMINATION THEY DID SURVIVE. TO THEM, LIKE THE HEBREWS, THE WORK OF GOD'S HAND WAS VERY REAL, THEY WATCHED CROPS GROW WHERE NOTHING HAD GROWN BEFORE: THEY FELT AND EXPERIENCED THE MAGNIFICENCE OF GOD'S CREATION AS THEY HUNTED IN THE VIRGIN FORRESTS. THEY EXPERIENCED GOD'S LOVE AND CONCERN AS THEY WATCHED THEIR TINY COMMUNITY GROW, AS FAMILIES ADJUSTED AND CARRIED ON THEIR NEW LIVES.

over →

(*) (1) WHO WOULD DISPUTE THE FACT THAT WE ARE INFINITELY BETTER OFF THAT OUR PREDECESSORS? WHO WOULD DISPUTE THE FACT THAT WE HERE IN DYER ARE MORE COMFORTABLE THAN PEOPLE IN ANY OTHER COUNTRY IN THE WORLD? THESE ARE ESTABLISHED FACTS AND I DON'T INTEND TO BALABOR THEM. BUT HOW DIFFERENT OUR CELEBRATION IS FROM THEIRS. IS GOD LESS ACTIVE TODAY THAN HE WAS IN 1620? IS HE NO LONGER THE LORD OF ALL NATURE? IS HE NO LONGER THE CREATOR AND SUSTAINER OF ALL THINGS?

THE GOD OF THE HEBREWS AND THE PILGRIMS IS NO LESS REAL TODAY. AS A MATTER OF FACT WE HAVE EVERY REASON TO BE MORE SURE OF HIS PRESENCE. WE HAVE BEEN BORN INTO THE PORTION OF HIS WORLD THAT HAS PROSPERED LIKE NO OTHER. WE HAVE WITNESSED HIS GENIUS AT WORK IN THE CREATIVE MINDS OF THOSE AROUND US: THE REASERCHERS AND SCIENTISTS THAT HAVE MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR 180 MILLION PEOPLE TO EAT WELL DAILY: THAT HAVE CLOTHED ANDHOUSED US: THAT HAVE MADE COMFORT AND LUXURY WITHIN THE MEANS OF ALL.

THANKSGIVING IS STILL A HARVEST FESTIVAL. AND IT IS STILL FITTING THAT WE OBSERVE IT AS SUCH. LET US BE THANKFUL FOR THE FOOD WE EAT, THE CLOTHES WE WEAR, FOR ANYTHING AND EVERY THING THAT HAS MADE OUR LIFE COMFORTABLE AND PLEASANT. LET US REFLECT UPON THE FACT THAT GOD IS THE GOD OF ALL NATURE, THAT HE IS THE AUTHOR OF ALL LIFE, THAT FROM HIM ALL THINGS FLOW.